



VOL 32 NO 3 WATAC Inc. (Women and The Australian Church) News

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Dear Friends,

WATAC had the privilege of being involved with the first convocation of the laity, an initiative of the coalition of reform groups (ACCCR). These gatherings will run in parallel with the Plenary Council process of the Australian Catholic Church. The first session on 2 May had Joan Chittister as guest speaker. She explored *The Spiritual Mountains of the New Millennium* and related them to Israel's history of life with God where the people are brought to stark challenge and so to new growth.

A brief extract from her talk follows.

1. *Sinai--the mountain of personal spiritual development*
2. *Gilboa--the mountain of letting go of yesterday's church*
3. *Olivet--the mountain of solidarity with the poor*
4. *Moriah--the mountain of sacrifice for sake of others*
5. *Carmel--the mountain of holy choice*
6. *Hermon--the mountain of prophetic presence*
7. *Gerizim--the mountain of feminine equality*

And finally, the most ordinary of them all...

8. *the Mount of the Beatitudes with its unlimited inclusiveness.*

In the twenty-first century the mountains are clear:

To be spiritual people in the century to come, we must be holy people,

Not just church-going people;

We must be free people, not just rule-keeping people;

We must be people passionately involved on behalf of the poor, not just generous people;

We must be theologically discriminating people, not just docile people;

We must be prophetic people, not just patiently passive people;

We must be feminist people, not dualistic, hierarchical, patriarchal people.

We must be people who recognize that it is not that we are the church that is important.

What is important is that we remember that we are what is left of the gospel in this changing time. Israel was called to be mountain-climbing people. And so are we.

Please claim the date for the second and third convocations, Thursday, 26 August 2021 7 pm and Thursday, 4 November 7 pm. More information will be passed on as it becomes available.

Think about nominating WATAC members for a Life Membership Award. Nomination form attached. Applications close 31 December 2021.

Blessings,



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WOMEN SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Emilie Ng

A new podcast showcases women preaching the Gospel.

When Saint Mary Magdalene became the first person to see the resurrected Christ, she consequently became the first person to preach the Gospel.

This important piece of the Church's history raises an interesting question for some Catholic women – can women still preach the Gospel today? According to a new podcast featuring a diverse line-up of Australian Christian women, the answer is a resounding yes.

Australian Women Preach is a joint project of WATAC Inc (Women and the Australian Church) and The Grail in Australia that aims to give Christian women an opportunity to break open the Gospel.

The podcast is being produced by former ABC radio journalist Louise Maher and has the public endorsement of Parramatta Bishop Vincent Long, who recommended it to fellow clergy, catechists, and other Catholics who desire to enrich themselves with the unique insight and wisdom of Australian Christian women.

The podcast is also a direct response to one of the recommendations for the Australian Plenary Council, to be held in October this year.

The recommendation, from the discernment paper titled Prayerful and Eucharistic, proposed for the approval and encouragement of training suitably qualified lay men and women 'to break open the Word within the community, supporting parishioners to share reflections on the Word out of their experience'.

WATAC vice president Tracy McEwan, who is part of the team that has created the podcast, said the project featured a mixture of Catholic and other Christian women preaching the Gospel.

This included a line-up of familiar faces including ecology advocate Jacqui Remond, Good Samaritan Congregational Leader Sister Patty Fawkner, systematic theologian Dr Cristina Lledo Gomez, Drs Margaret Scharf OP and Patricia Madigan OP, and music theologian Dr Danielle Lynch.

All of these women are leaving an enormous legacy of inspirational writings and lectures, but how many of them are preaching?



‘Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholic women in Australia in particular, are really highly educated in theology – we’ve got great Biblical scholars, we’ve got amazing theologians’, Tracy says.

‘Where do they go to showcase their talent, particularly if they’re Catholic women, where they not just write academic papers, but convey a sense of mission and purpose, to get their interpretation of the Gospel out there?’

Tracy said preaching in churches was not new for women in Australia, since many Protestant women were already giving sermons and homilies. Catholic women could also take heart from the first person to preach the Gospel.

‘Mary Magdalene probably was the first person to preach the Gospel’, Tracy says. ‘I think a lot of these women would be really honoured to be considered part of that genealogy.’

Outside of WATAC, Tracy is also studying her PhD in Theology, focusing on researching the religious identity of current and former Catholic women from Generation X.

‘In my study there’s an overwhelming theme, that women do feel silenced and disempowered in the church structures as they are in Australia at the moment’, Tracy says. ‘I see my work in WATAC and the podcast as a way of liberating and empowering women.’

New episodes of the podcast will be released weekly until the Plenary Council first gathers in October. By then, Tracy hopes the Australian Catholic Bishops will be open to exploring the possibility of women as preachers.

‘Part of the way that we can showcase women, we’ve now got them able to read from the lectionary, they’re now able to serve on the altar in official capacity, surely the next step is to allow them to break open the Gospel in a homily.’

‘If you have any doubt they can do it, listen to this podcast and you’ll hear amazing women from all across the denominations, a really diverse set of backgrounds and perspectives’, Tracy says.

This article was written by Emily Ng and was first published on 18 May 2021 edition of Australian Catholics and is republished with permission.

CATHOLIC WOMEN STEP INTO THE PULPIT IN GERMANY

Delphine Nerbollier

GERMANY — The effort is intended to be highly symbolic.

Ulrike Göken-Huisman, a 59-year-old theologian and president of the Catholic Women's Association of Germany (KFD), preached at Mass last Monday in the Church of St. Maximilian in Düsseldorf in western Germany.

In fact, she has regularly given homilies at Services of the Word since 1988, which is normal practice throughout the country. But this was different. For the second year in a row, she was one of twelve women in twelve different locations who took part in this May 17 nationwide action called "Preachers' Day". "Our goal is to make it clear that women can preach and can do it well," says Göken-Huisman, who has two children.

"The Church is missing out on a lot by not allowing us to do it. In fact, it's a missed opportunity! There is a wealth of talent among women that needs to be tapped into," she insists.

'The apostles were not all men'

The KFD is one of two women's federations in the country. They chose May 17 for their initiative because of Junia, a female saint honoured on this day by the Orthodox Church.

St. Paul mentions Junia in the Letter to the Romans. "Junia was definitely a female apostle who was mistaken for a man for a long time," Göken-Huisman points out. "Fortunately, thanks to new translations, it has become clear that she was a woman. With our event — 12 Women, 12 Places, 12 Homilies — we want to show that not all apostles were men," the theologian adds.

Through this concerted action, which other women across Germany have spontaneously joined, the organizers hope to achieve progress in the synodal journey that was launched a year and a half ago.

"We expect the synodal path to allow women to officially preach in Eucharistic celebrations [Mass]," argues Göken-Huisman. She is sure that "Rome cannot oppose it". Göken-Huisman is convinced that women will be able to become priests one day, but she knows that "the road will be long. We're taking it one step at a time," she says.

'It's a question of what we have the right to do'

Surprisingly, the German bishops once again put up no official opposition to the May 17 initiative.

However, as Clara Steinbrecher of the conservative Maria 1.0 movement recently said, "the Catholic Church is not a framework in which everyone can wish for what they want."

The timing of this action comes a week after another initiative criticizing Rome: the May 11 blessing of homosexual couples by a hundred priests.

"On all these issues, it's a question of what we have the right to do and what we do not have the right to do," says Göken-Huisman. "How can we explain that women don't have equal rights in the Catholic Church when they do in society?" she asks.

"These various actions reflect a growing dissatisfaction on the part of the faithful," says Michael Seewald who teaches theology at the University of Münster.

"These protest movements are supported by a majority of the country's Catholics. The opponents have very good contacts with Rome and are making their voices heard, but they are a small group," he notes.

'Demand change!'

But can these 12 women preachers succeed in bringing about change? Seewald is more nuanced. "It would be possible to find solutions at the regional level and to leave room for manoeuvring on the ground for these issues," he believes.

"But I don't know if Rome is ready for that. Rome is looking at the German synodal path very skeptically and has sent negative messages on the four topics of discussion there. It is difficult to be very optimistic," Seewald admits.

But women preachers like Ulrike Göken-Huisman remain hopeful and optimistic. Their new slogan is, "Stay in the Church! Demand change!"

This article was written by Delphine Nerbollier and was first published on 25 May 2021 edition of LaCroix and is republished with permission.

STOP SUPPRESSING CATHOLICS, OUTSPOKEN NUN TELLS AUSTRALIAN CHURCH LEADERS

Farrah Tomazin

An outspoken US nun who was recently embroiled in a censorship row with Melbourne's Archbishop has warned Australia's Catholic Church it faces an inevitable decline unless it stops suppressing rank-and-file members pushing for reform.

The nation's bishops are under pressure to overhaul the church after years of sex scandals and internal unrest, and one of America's most prominent Benedictine nuns, Sister Joan Chittister, has now renewed calls for women to be ordained and for laypeople to be given more power over their parishes, declaring that the church needs to "grow up" if it wants to thrive.

Such reforms were meant to be thrashed out at the most significant conference Australian Catholic bishops have held in 80 years, the Plenary Council, which is scheduled to take place in October.

However, working documents prepared for the event have prompted concerns that some of the more contentious issues on the agenda could be cast aside or not addressed properly by the bishops, despite past assurances that "everything is on the table".

"Everyone knows that the church in Australia needs a major overhaul of its governance, culture and structures, but instead of setting out a clear, concise and coherent blueprint for reform, this document is a ground plan for inertia," said Catholics for Renewal president Peter Wilkinson. "It is very disappointing."

Sister Joan, who this month headlined an event by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, told *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* she shared concerns that "suppression by the bishops" would impede much-needed improvements. This, she warned, would prompt more members to abandon their parishes.

"There are one of two ways that this can end. The bishops can embrace the concerns and the need for resolution or they continue to ignore the laity – at which point the church will someday wake up in the morning and find out that the church is in fact gone."

In a speech to a 3000-strong audience this month, Sister Joan added: "Catholicism must grow up, beyond the parochial to the global, beyond one system and one tradition to a broader way of looking at life ... Why not married priests, women priests, or women cardinals?"

Sister Joan is a writer, feminist and theologian who has spent 50 years advocating for social

justice and church reform. However, the prominent US nun found herself at the centre of an Australian censorship saga two years ago, when she was disendorsed from speaking at a Catholic education conference soon after Melbourne Archbishop Peter Comensoli learnt of plans to include her.

The snub prompted a fierce backlash from rank-and-file Catholics, but the Archdiocese initially sought to dismiss the matter as a misunderstanding, saying the Archbishop had simply requested “that more names aligned to the themes of a national Catholic education conference be considered”.

Sister Joan disagreed, describing the episode as an “insult” to the Catholic education system.

“Of course it was censorship; there wasn’t any doubt about that,” she said this week. “Nobody has a right to tell anybody else what to think. That is not helpful to any organisation – state or church. You’re only burning it down from the bottom up if you do that.”



Sister Joan’s appearance in Australia comes at a critical moment for the church ahead of October’s Plenary Council. Expectations were high in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, which found the hierarchical nature of the church, coupled with its lack of governance, had created “a culture of deferential obedience” in which the protection of paedophile priests was left unchallenged.

However, rank-and-file Catholics have become increasingly concerned about the church’s will to change. Such fears were compounded in March when a working document prepared for the Plenary Council did not give enough credence to critical issues that members have been seeking to address.

Peter Johnstone, the head of the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, urged Australia’s bishops to use the Plenary Council to genuinely tackle the “existential crisis” the church faces.

This article by Farrah Tomazin was first published in the 16 May 2021 edition of The Age and is republished with permission.

RESPECT@WORK SHINES A LIGHT ON MALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE CULTURES

Patty Fawkner

Admittedly, I have only read the 40-page Executive Summary and Recommendations rather than the entire 995-page Australian Human Rights Commission report, *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*.

Though delayed for more than 12 months, the release of the report is timely given the plethora of allegations of sexual harassment and abuse within the walls of Federal Parliament. The report does not specifically examine sexual abuse within Church workplaces. However, it does shine a light on women's safety within workplace cultures such as the Catholic Church.

The report notes (pp 20-21) that workplace settings where there is a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment include those that are male dominated due to:

- the gender ratio;
- the over-representation of men in senior leadership roles;
- the nature of the work being considered 'non-traditional' for women;
- the masculine workplace culture;
- being organised according to a hierarchical structure.

Even though the gender ratio favours women in the pews and in many Church ministries, the *Respect@Work* findings indicate that the Church is potentially a very unsafe place for women. Senior leadership roles in the Catholic Church are exclusively male; it is considered "non-traditional", indeed "divinely forbidden", for women to be ordained leaders; and the Church is hierarchically structured in the extreme. The Catholic Church is intrinsically male dominated in its leadership, governance, liturgy and language.

The dangers that inhere in Church workplace settings was borne out for me when I participated in an online International Women's Day event run by the Voices of Faith organisation in March this year. Differing from the usual diverse group of speakers, this year's event, called *Sisters Unveil Your Truths*, asked Religious Sisters from around the world to reflect on their experience of obedience.

The testimonies of two religious Sisters – Mumbi Kigutha CPPS from Kenya and Julie George SSpS from India – were disturbing. They were speaking about a present reality rather than about incidents from a distant past. Sister Mumbi outlined the many forms of sexual abuse nuns had

suffered at the hands of priests and bishops and, at times, religious superiors. The abuse was able to flourish because of grossly patriarchal attitudes, abuse of power, gaslighting, domination rather than collaboration, and the blaming and shaming of victims.

Elsewhere, Mumbi wrote:

I'm sharing this because I'm a victim myself of psychological and spiritual abuse and have listened to the cries of victims of sexual, psychological, spiritual abuse from powerful clergy and religious within the Church who continue to live their lives with no care for the victim and no consequences for their actions.

Sister Julie spoke of the double standards in dealing with priests and nuns who have violated their vow of celibacy. A priest is relocated to another diocese while the Sister is often compelled to leave her congregation, certainly if she is pregnant.

Julie said that the appeal to obedience to the hierarchy and respect given to and demanded by them, the expectation that religious women unquestioningly obey and serve, often without adequate remuneration, allowed abuse to thrive.

Respect was one-way. No respect was given to anyone who dared raise concerns. Such women were summarily dismissed as "troublesome". Sisters could be publicly criticised, priests could refuse to celebrate Mass at the convent of those who complained about clergy behaviour, and clergy-required references for study and ministry appointments could be withheld or given in exchange for sexual favours.

When it was my turn to speak, I said that, personally, I did not feel that I had ever been wounded directly by my vow of obedience and, unlike Mumbi and Julie, I didn't have any distressing stories to tell. But I was wrong.

As I began to write this article it dawned on me that I had experienced verbal sexual abuse as a young Sister. This is the first time I have named it as such.

I taught in a Catholic primary school in the early 1980s when members of our congregation were beginning to replace the traditional veil and habit with contemporary clothing or "civvies".

If the parish priest saw me without my veil, he would later declare from the pulpit during Mass that he had seen a "topless nun". No respect at work here! Though not as traumatic as many of the instances of abuse documented in *Respect@Work*, I still felt humiliated, disrespected and angry. At the time, it did not occur to me to challenge the priest or ask him to desist.

Prior to reading the *Respect@Work* report I read another document, the *Instrumentum Laboris*,

the working document for the Australian Catholic Church's Plenary Council. I am pleased that I will attend the first Plenary Council Assembly, which will be held in October this year with the second Assembly to be held in June 2022.

I read the document, keen to see what it said about the role of women in the Church. In all truth, I was disappointed.

The document gives a nod to fuller participation of women in the mission of the Church. It refers to the "perceived" under-representation of women in formal leadership and decision-making roles. It acknowledges a need for the Church to be open to the gifts and contributions of women in leadership and decision-making "at appropriate levels". And it admits that "some" Catholic women have encountered patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes within the Church.

The qualified language dampened my expectations but not my hopes that the fruit of the Plenary Council journey will be a more inclusive and less glaringly unequal role for women in the Church.

It occurs to me, that as well as reading the Instrumentum Laboris, all members attending the Plenary Council, including the hierarchy, would do well to read the Executive Summary of Respect@Work. It might, it just might, shift perceptions of the risk the Church poses for women because of the over-representation of men in senior leadership roles and its entrenched hierarchical structure.

I am holding tightly to the Plenary Council's commitment to synodality, that is, to communal discernment, dialogue and listening to all voices. Herein lies my hope.

This article was first published in the May 2021 edition of The Good Oil, the e-journal of the Good Samaritan Sisters www.goodsams.org.au and is republished with permission.

*There where you are
you will find God.
Mary MacKillop 1871*

WOMEN WILL IN TIME 'COME TO DO MUCH'

Kate Keefe

'Women in time to come will do much', said Mary Ward back in the seventeenth century, and we are still striving to put those words into action; but we can't do everything on our own, and we can't do it with our hands tied behind our backs, with others pretending we aren't there.

Some of the bitterness evinced over the marches to demand safe streets for women arose because it is not only women who should be calling for this. Just as childcare is not a 'women's issue' but a 'parents' issue', safe streets are something from which we would all benefit. The distinction here should not be between men and women, but between acceptable behaviour and unacceptable behaviour. When men object to other men's behaviour, we might make some progress. It would be something new and difficult for them, since so much of young men's identity seems to be almost tribal (football, groups in pubs, gamers), and based on keeping someone else out of the group (nerds, different races, but above all women). With equal numbers of sons and daughters, I would like both groups to be fairly treated. We don't want to demonise men; we don't want to victimise women. We work best when we work together.

All great enterprises have needed the input of women as well as men. Their contribution has often been overlooked. One of the exciting developments of the last few years has been the willingness to seek out and make better known some of these women, from artists like Artemisia Gentileschi, to mathematicians like Ada Lovelace, to scientists and computer wizards like the three women at NASA in the film *Hidden Figures*, working on the first space flights.

Women tended in the past to miss out on the publicity and the prizes (Rosalind Franklin and the structure of DNA?). Maybe we aren't as good at blowing our own trumpet. Regularly nowadays I read obituaries about some amazing women whose achievements have been forgotten, often because they were so modest or chose to focus on other things. Sometimes the habit of official discretion has become instinctive, and we learn of great deeds at Bletchley Park or as part of SOE or similar, only once someone has died. Luckily, we are now moving beyond the pioneering women phase, and it is entirely normal to see women among the background forces working on space landings, epidemiological research and a whole range of other disciplines, and even occasionally fronting a press conference or two. It does not surprise us, and that is good, because if you investigate historical achievements, you don't have to dig very far before finding that of course women were involved too, and not just as the people doing the cooking, cleaning and nurturing without which the human race would have died out long ago.

The problem was that they were invisible.

Even in the early Church, there were a lot of women, but you have to read the text carefully, almost between the lines, to find them. St Paul refers by name to many of them when he sends greetings. There were ‘many’ women accompanying Jesus, even if the (male) narrators of the Gospels tend not to give us names (though there are several Marys, like the Queen of Scots’ attendants). ‘Many women were there by the cross, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus and looked after him’ (Mt 27.55). Jesus had several women among his followers, enough of them to support and protect each other in a society even more gender-restricted than our own, but the (male) Gospel writers, decades down the line after the Lord’s departure, list and label only their own mates. If only we had a Gospel written by one of Jesus’ female friends. The problem again is not that the women aren’t there, the problem is visibility. Without visibility, there is no recognition. It is very hard to make a difference if even your existence is not admitted. I’m not talking about the recognition of praise for achievement, compensation for effort or anything like that; I’m talking about the awareness that women belong in and contribute to every organisation – including the Church.

While Jesus is there on earth, he makes space for them. Mary of Bethany is allowed to sit at his feet with the men, and Mary Magdalene is sent as the first messenger to tell of the Resurrection (but the men don’t believe her testimony until much later). Once Jesus is gone, the rot sets in at an early stage, when the apostles decide to make up the numbers after the loss of Judas and then later (Acts 6), when they need more people to help with charitable distribution. Not realising that the word ‘men’ equally meant ‘men and women’ in those historical days, they unfortunately picked only men, and the hierarchy of the Church dug itself deeper and deeper into a single-sex groove.

Occasionally we see glimpses of a different approach, as with double monasteries, one half for men, one half for women, occasionally even directed by a female Abbess, both in Britain and on the Continent (e.g., Hilda of Whitby, Bridget of Sweden). But then the authorities decided that holy women needed to be kept apart and under male control, so only enclosed orders were allowed for women, though monks could choose whether to be enclosed or roving preachers and missionaries, and the double monasteries were no longer allowed. Female convents still had to let men in, because of the priestly monopoly. Men were in a position to prevent any female access at all, as they still do on Mount Athos.

Why are men so frightened of women? Women tend to be smaller, less strong, less rich, less violent, less noisy. The fear has to be learned behaviour, because little boys are not naturally

scared of little girls, nor are they more violent, unless you allow them to think that it's acceptable behaviour (I'm extrapolating from my own family here). Once they go to school, it's harder to prevent violence, because small humans will always copy what they see, and some primary school children have sadly already witnessed violence at home. We need to be much more concerned to prevent physical violence at school; and as soon as a gender element appears, we need to make it clear immediately that it is unacceptable. No girl, from nursery school up to sixth form, should ever be encouraged to make allowances or expected to put up with any degree of physical violence. We know where it leads. As Margaret Atwood memorably wrote, 'Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them', and the facts bear her out.

The education of boys is crucial. For years we have been teaching girls to be scared, to be careful, to worry before any event about how they are going to get home. School – for girls – reinforces conversation from home. My girls discuss this sort of thing a lot, with varying degrees of irritation; my boys hear these conversations, and occasionally join in. But the boys were never offered any advice at school about not being intimidating, about not following too closely, about being aware of the feelings of a woman out at night; about the whole central question of consent and freedom. Not everybody has sisters. But imagine the impact if a male teacher talked to a class of young men about wolf-whistling and cat-calling, let alone about conversations ranking girls and 'tottometers', a word I had mercifully not come across until Boris Johnson used it.

The reason why inclusive language is important is that it contributes to women's visibility, and visibility is the most basic requirement for justice. We tell women to keep to lighted streets; if you can be seen, you will be more safe. Not being seen, being kept in the dark, trying to keep out of sight: all these make you more vulnerable. Visibility is not just about street lighting; it is also making sure that women are included in the discussion.

Many years ago, I worked at the GLC. People poked (usually gentle) fun at the Women's Committee and the Ethnic Minorities Committee. Every report on a project, or with a proposal, had to have a paragraph on the implications for women, and the implications for ethnic minorities, even if in effect only to say that there were no such implications. I was slightly uncomfortable about this in those days. A whole report and women's implications rated one measly paragraph? But it made everyone notice that women existed, indeed, made up half the population, and maybe would be impacted differently. All this was valuable, and very much better than deliberately choosing words which refer only to men, because women don't matter.

Many parishes have Justice and Peace groups, but for these to exist in good faith, the Church needs to be on the right side of this argument. The Church cannot claim the moral high ground if there is no understanding that women are people just as much as men. Dorothy Sayers wrote a fascinating polemic, ‘Are Women Human?’, and the question is sadly still live today. The Government has a similar problem of credibility over human rights; if women don’t have human rights in a country, no one has. Exclusively men’s rights are not ‘human rights’. Justice only for men is not justice. For centuries the Church has been part of the problem, a solid example of what it should be campaigning against. It needs to be part of the solution, especially in countries with a long Catholic history. It needs to tell the men to accept women as equals; but it can’t be convincing unless it stops pretending that they don’t exist, that they should never be

mentioned aloud.

The Church has been on the wrong side of this argument for a very long time, just as it was over Galileo, slavery and anti-Semitism, but it has managed to alter its position on all three, even if it took unconscionably long to do so. Women have been around since the Garden of Eden. We should be able to address a congregation as ‘brothers and sisters’ without worrying; psalms don’t need to refer only to ‘the just man’. We all deserve better than this. Women are not to be swept under the carpet or hidden away in the small print; they are the essential complementary half of the likeness of God.

Kate Keefe composes musical settings for the Mass and writes about the psalms. You can follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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2021
Mission
one heart many voices

Leadership
Now

**“Come, let us talk
this over. Let us
dare to Dream.”**
(Let us Dream Prologue 7)

A virtual
conference
**1-3 September
2021**

In addition, a
day of creativity
and formation
**4 September
2021**

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH MUST FIND A WAY TO ACCOMMODATE THE RELATIONSHIPS OF ITS LGBTQ MEMBERS

Diarmuid Pepper

In a ceremony at Westminster Cathedral, the seat of English Catholicism, the twice-divorced Boris Johnson married Carrie Symonds.

Boris Johnson was confirmed as an Anglican as a teenager. He also has a child with Carrie, out of wedlock, and has other children from previous relationships (it's believed he has fathered seven children).

None of this is meant as a judgement of the British Prime Minister and his new wife. Sacraments are not reserved for the righteous and we shouldn't use them as a political point scoring tool.

The Church has shown compassion and understanding to the newly-weds. Life is complex and not always straight forward.

Why can this same understanding not be afforded to same-sex couples?

Many people have wondered how Boris Johnson was able to receive the sacrament of marriage in a Catholic church given he is twice divorced. While it's important to note that he didn't receive any special treatment, some Church leaders have still expressed concern at the ceremony.

Canon Paul Gargaro is the head of the Scottish Catholic Tribunal, which primarily deals with marriage nullities. He took to Facebook to clear up some of the confusion as to how the twice-divorced Johnson could be married in the Catholic Church, despite Canon Law not allowing the re-marriage of a divorcee whose spouse is still alive.

While he acknowledged that "we don't know all the details", he said the "situation seems to be as follows".

Catholics (and Johnson is a baptised Catholic) have an obligation to get married within the Catholic Church. Though Gargaro says "becoming an Anglican is a serious sin for a Catholic, it does not remove the obligation to marry in the Church".

Johnson's previous marriages did not take place within the Catholic Church, and Gargaro says "these weddings would be invalid for 'lack of canonical form' and he would therefore be free to marry" and "bound by obligation to marry in the Catholic Church".

Gargaro adds that “lack of canonical form is one type of marriage nullity”, which means there was no “special treatment” for Johnson in his receiving the sacrament of marriage in the Church.

As Gargaro notes, “countless people will get married in the Church this year despite being divorced because their previous marriages were outside the Church”.

It is worth noting that such a dispensation isn't offered to divorcees who are not baptised Catholics. In these instances, an annulment would be required before they are able to marry within the Catholic Church.

However, even though there was no bar to Johnson being married in a Catholic ceremony, Gargaro says Johnson’s “treatment of women and fidelity does seem to leave a lot to be desired” and he hoped the priest who presided over the wedding had “proper marriage preparation for them” in light of this.

Canon Paul Gargaro says Johnson’s “treatment of women” leaves a lot to be desired, yet his marriage goes off without a hitch.

How hurtful this must be to LGBTQ Catholics, who are told that their relationship is so sinful that it cannot be blessed, even in private.

In March of this year, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) said it was “impossible” for God to “bless sin” in response to a question on whether the Church had “the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex”.

Pope Francis says the “mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is an immense mystery” but it can be summarised as such: “God is love”.

Gay members of the Catholic Church exist and they want to be a part of the faithful. The Church must find a way to make room for their love and blessing same-sex civil-unions is a common-sense way to afford the dignity they deserve as members of the faith.

It’s not some radical idea but something that is already happening in Catholic churches around the world, notably in Germany, where around 100 churches are defying the prohibition on blessing same-sex unions.

The “Love Wins” movement emerged in the German Church in response to the CDF’s proclamation that God “cannot bless sin”.

The group says they “will continue to accompany people who enter into a binding partnership in the future and bless their relationship”, adding that they “will not refuse a blessing

ceremony”.

Volunteers, accompanied by 16 German priests, gathered thousands of signatures to a petition calling on the Church to extend blessings to same-sex couples, while more conservative churches were encouraged to fly a rainbow flag to highlight that all forms of love are worthy of God’s graces.

The Catholic Church is a pilgrim church that must always be forwards looking.

As Saint John Henry Newman notes: “To live is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often.”

Change is needed to treat the Church’s gay members with dignity, but also to keep abreast with changing times.

Two-thirds of Catholics in Ireland support same-sex marriage. In the UK, that figure is 78 per cent. But the matter is more pressing than opinion polls.

Father James Martin, a prominent US priest and editor of “America Magazine”, said the CDF’s statement that the Church cannot “bless sin” caused “anger” and “demoralisation” within the Church that he has not seen since the emergence of child sex abuse scandals.

And in an interview with The New York Times, Reinhard Kleinewiese, who blesses same-sex couples at his German church, said: “We can’t ignore the fact that a lot of homosexual couples have already left the Church.”

He emphasised the need to “we make clear that we are not in agreement with Rome on certain issues and prohibitions”.

If the Church can accommodate the wedding of Boris Johnson, whose “treatment of women and fidelity” leaves a lot to be desired, then it must find a way to accommodate committed relationships between its gay members.

This article was written by Diarmuid Pepper and was first published on 04 June 2021 edition of The Tablet, and is republished with permission.

*Come Soul Sister, Spirit Sophia and bring the new creation:
the breaking of bread, the raising of the Cup, the doing of justice.
Let us eat, drink and partake of the banquet of life.
Receive the love, healing and nourishment of Spirit Sophia.*

Extract from WATAC Liturgy for Women’s Ordination Worldwide May 16, 2021

NEW CANON ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION NOTHING NEW, CAN BE CHANGED

Phyllis Zagano

Now it is formally illegal to ordain a woman as a deacon. Or as a priest. Or as a bishop.

On June 1, Pope Francis promulgated revisions to the Code of Canon Law detailing crimes and punishments. The new "Book VI: Penal Sanctions in the Church" takes effect Dec. 8. Most of the revisions have to do with crimes of sexual abuse and the responses (or non-responses) of bishops and religious superiors. Some have to do with financial crimes.

And then there is the one about women's ordination: "Can. 1379 § 3. Both a person who attempts to confer a sacred order on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive the sacred order, incur a *latae sententiae* excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See; a cleric, moreover, may be punished by dismissal from the clerical state."

While the folks on the right can barely contain their glee, and more folks on the left are heading for the door, there is nothing new about this tiny sentence in a much longer document. In fact, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith presented the same wording and the same penalty in a 2007 General Decree. Then, in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI presented nearly identical modifications to legal norms regarding "grave delicts."

Francis now presents an entirely new law book. On the whole, he repeats or strengthens the ways canon law can chasten, punish or even dismiss offenders in a broad variety of crimes. And he includes laity as well as clerics.

Francis also codifies some interesting concepts. For example, drunkenness is not a defence. In fact, one is doubly responsible if the crime occurs during wilful drunkenness, and the penalty for a drunken crime must reflect that greater responsibility.

Then again, there are a lot of loopholes: It seems that ignorance of the law is indeed an excuse. Finally, there is some new language: Twice "means of social communication" are mentioned, once for exciting contempt for religion or the church, another for recording confessions and releasing the information. "Technology" also makes an appearance, in relation to pornography and grooming vulnerable individuals.

The revisions to this particular book of canon law actualize things Francis has spoken about; in particular they more clearly describe sexual abuse crimes and the punishments thereof. Some complain he has not gone far enough, and others complain about an apparent favouring of

secrecy, but on the whole, the revised and new canons seem a step in the right direction.

But then there is that new canon about ordaining women, which seems dropped in from nowhere. Maybe so, maybe no. Recall, the wording duplicates the CDF's 2007 decree and Benedict's 2010 modifications to legal norms. Proponents of women moving into the clerical ranks may be disappointed, but there is nothing new.

However, the new canon specifies "a sacred order." That could be just priesthood, at least if history is to be respected. By the time the canonist Gracian collected canon laws in the 12th century, few women and fewer men were ordained to the diaconate as a permanent vocation. The law developed so that no (man) could be ordained a deacon unless he was destined to become a priest. Only more modern arguments conjoin the diaconate and the priesthood, such that the diaconate is part of priesthood. It is not. The Orthodox have no such confusion, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has said nothing bars ordaining women deacons. In fact, to conjoin the two orders is to argue for women priests, because there is a long and documented history of women sacramentally ordained as deacons. What the church has done, it can do again.

The important thing to remember is that the now codified restriction against ordaining women, at least as deacons, is a "merely ecclesiastical law." That is, it can be changed. Recall, if you will, that Francis modified canon law to allow all laity — male and female — to be installed as lectors and acolytes. That represented a development of doctrine. And the current discipline is that all persons who are ordained deacons must first have served in these two installed lay ministries.

We know "merely ecclesiastical laws" can be modified. So does Francis.

The best news in all this came at a press conference when Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, answered an interesting question. Catholic News Service asked why the revised canon does not specify priestly ordination, thereby leaving open the question of women deacons. After all, there is now a second study commission on women deacons.

Arrieta said that law reflects current church teaching, and "If we come to a different theological conclusion, we will modify the norm."

This article was written by Phyllis Zagano and was first published in 07 June 2021 edition of National Catholic Reporter, and is republished with permission.

BOOK LAUNCH
WRESTLING WITH THE CHURCH HIERARCHY:
ENGAGING WITH THE PLENARY COUNCIL AND BEYOND
BY JOHN WARHURST

Genevieve Jacobs

When I think about being a Catholic, I return to similar places as, perhaps, many of you do.

I remember St Brigid's Quandialla, a tiny wooden church in Western NSW.

I remember Father Cork's interminable sermons on hot summer mornings as the varnish on the seats got slightly sticky, and the day Stan Nowlan stood up and announced that since he had several hundred sheep to drench in the yards, he'd be leaving, thank you Father.

I remember when Father Greg Beath took the angel statues down from the altar and stood them, instead, in the confessional boxes halfway down the church, thereby shocking, so to speak, the be-Jesuses out of everyone not expecting to see them looming there.

I remember cups of tea and kindness and chocolate slice outside the church, my mother's picnic basket and the white cedar trees she planted in the churchyard.

I remember us all there – the neighbours and the cousins and Father Brown who'd been a Rat of Tobruk and smoked too much and drove too fast and tried to teach me how to do the cryptic crossword – unsuccessfully.

At school with the Loreto nuns, I remember women of courage and brilliance, who taught me self-belief and social justice.

I remember, as many of you do, a culture, a world, a way of being that was distinctively Australian and Catholic. A world that formed and shaped so many of us.

What is left? What, now, is left? An empty vessel? All sound and fury, signifying nothing? How has the promise of Vatican II ebbed away? It's been a hard decade or two, hasn't it? We've learned that the church of our childhoods concealed monstrous sins of commission and omission, sins literally beyond our imagining.

In following Christ's gospel of radical equality and humanity we've discovered we are no longer willing to accept that as Orwell would have it, all animals are equal but some are more equal than others that many of us will always be deeply, intrinsically, and no matter what we do and what our human gifts are..... less than.

We have seen a seemingly impregnable social edifice crumble before eyes under the weight of those realisations.

The Church of two thousand years, the church so big and beautiful and sprawling in all its mad rich diversity and spectacular embroidered history is shrivelling in this country until its voice may be no more than a ghost on the wind sighing away across the water.

But at its head we see a leadership often more willing to batten down the hatches than to admit that it is catastrophically wounded, that the water is rushing in on every side.

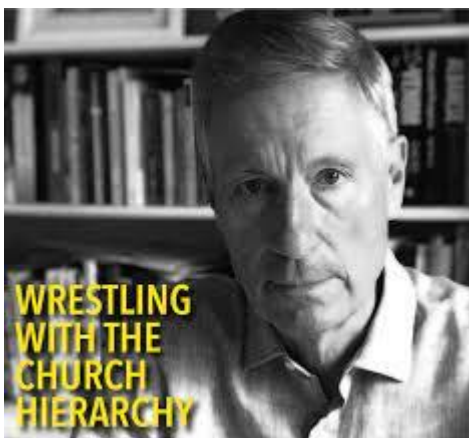
John's book argues precisely this: that the hierarchical Australian church is now all but fatally flawed because of its failure at multiple levels to commit to the principles of equality, transparency and truthfulness that are central to Australian life, and commonly held values by the whole Australian community.

It's a conundrum, this. Catholic schools burst at the seams with children, both Catholic and not, whose parents want them to be morally grounded, taught compassion and regard for others, and educated well as whole human beings. A generation is being shaped by those values – while being unlikely to call themselves Catholics – including perhaps my own children, who are great on the social justice values, less aligned to the actual faith.

Catholic hospitals and Catholic social services are vigorous and much-loved providers of essential human care, underpinned by respect for fundamental human dignity, as are agencies like Caritas and Vinnies – among the most trusted names in Australia.

So the lay Catholics who are overwhelmingly now running these places seem to be getting something right in terms of utility and trust for the community as a whole – but the pews are increasingly empty ...and John notes that church attendance is essentially in freefall.

You know this – over the past 20 years church attendance among Catholics born in Australia



and other English-speaking countries has almost halved. One third of those attending are between 60 and 74; Mass attendance on a typical Sunday is 11.8 per cent of Catholics (9.5 per cent of men and less than 6 per cent of those aged between 20 and 34).

What growth there is happens among people of non-English speaking backgrounds – and arguably that is also subject to generational change. I sometimes look

around me on Saturday nights at Sacred Heart Cootamundra and count who will be left in another 20 years.

Wrestling with the Church Hierarchy is an attempt to dig deeply into what is going so wrong – and whether there is any hope for change. It comes from the perspective of someone whose loyalty to the church is unquestioned but not unquestioning – and as a journalist I am bound to repeat what all of you know – that there is no more valuable person than the one who asks hard questions born of love.

John makes, in this book, such fundamental arguments that they would seem nonsensical if applied to any other institution in Australia. He says that we need many more women in leadership positions – and this in a church that is, practically speaking, run by women in this country who represent more than 60% of most congregations.

Kristina Keneally has been urging women for some time to consider the impact of withdrawing their volunteer labour. Imagine if we stopped washing the linen, doing the flowers... running the confirmation classes... providing Scripture lessons... secretarial services... and staffing St Vincent de Paul... Kristina told me she had been editing and even writing her parish priest's sermons... I invite you to imagine a situation where a male senator would be asked to do that for a female church leader...

But of course, the highest advisory levels in the church are occupied by men and men only and will, by virtue of our bodies alone, always exclude women. Always. We are made in the image of Christ, except when it comes to leadership. John says that we need much greater lay participation and co-responsible governance – and this in a church where vocations have slowed to a trickle for decades and where many religious orders are in danger of complete extinction.

And yet, recent responses from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the *Light from the Southern Cross* report on *Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* say that the hierarchical structure of the church remains a given... that there can be no really substantial change even where willing, able, qualified and committed lay people stand ready to serve.

John says that we need greater transparency and accountability in all aspects of Church affairs including finance and communications – and this in a church that has concealed the most grievous criminal acts of abuse and often attempted to compensate for them, when caught out, with derisory sums for the lives destroyed.

There are the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual

Abuse, which specifically identified the hierarchical nature of the church, coupled with its lack of governance, in creating “a culture of deferential obedience” in which the protection of paedophile priests was left unchallenged. But at a much more mundane level than this, as John notes, even Catholic media in this country and indeed this archdiocese is subject to seemingly mysterious forces of external control – responsible some years ago for removing those pesky letters to the editor from the Catholic Voice. And please note I do not blame the actual editors for this.

If you’ll permit me a side note on this, several years ago I was among a number of local journalists summoned to hear the archdiocesan response to mandatory reporting laws which would include breaking the seal of confession.

There was robust discussion with the archbishop and as I walked out with a senior priest, I turned to him and said – this won’t fly with the parents you know. Discussion on dogma aside, the parents and teachers won’t have it. And the response I got? “Well, that depends on how you report it, Genevieve.” As though it was my duty as a Catholic to toe the line and bring others to heel. I did not, I reported the truth. My task as a journalist is to gather the pertinent facts, not form part of the mechanism of manipulation.

And it didn’t go down well in the pews and the schoolyard as we all know.

So, in this context, what does the forthcoming Plenary Council mean for Australian Catholics? Will the church genuinely listen to all voices? Will it be a time of change and hope? Or even of vigorously contested ideas? Or will a self-selecting group huddle round the fires of the past and convince themselves once again that turning ever more closely inwards is the solution to a dangerous world where everything is someone else’s fault?

In October 2021, the Catholic Church in Australia will gather for the first Assembly of the Plenary Council to be held since the second Vatican Council. We are told... that when the decision to hold a Plenary Council was announced the entire People of God in Australia began preparing for this historic moment by listening to God and by listening to one another’s stories of faith.

In 2020, more than 280 members for the Plenary Council of Australia were announced, including members nominated by dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates, leaders of religious congregations, some church ministries, and a personal prelature to represent local churches. Interesting language about the entire people of God – thanks to six years of classics with the nuns, I’m fairly sure I know who the eparchies and ordinariates are, and personal prelatres...

but those words alone speak to who is preparing these documents quite strongly on their own.

Remember those figures about who is attending Mass? Just 11 per cent of those who identify as Catholics, heavily skewed towards older people... so I think it remains to be seen how diverse and representative of the whole of the Catholic church the delegates will be.

So where are there grounds for hope beyond the Plenary Council – come what may of that process, which I fervently hope will be good, vigorous, open and fruitful? John says of himself that he wants to be an optimist rather than a nag – and to use the good old Australian phrase – good luck with that in the current situation.

There are of course, renewal movements – and I guess that a good many of you have been part of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn – there is the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform. There are capable, intelligent and passionately committed people waiting to serve and that must be good for the church as a whole – and among them priests, lay people and religious, deeply motivated by love and service. The goodness of the church in the heart of its people is still palpable, evidenced by their refusal to give up caring, fighting and hoping – if only somebody would listen.

Controversial Benedictine nun Sister Joan Chittister recently told the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform that, “There are one of two ways that this can end. The bishops can embrace the concerns and the need for resolution or they continue to ignore the laity – at which point the church will someday wake up in the morning and find out that the church is in fact gone.”

Or in the words of Macbeth,

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death.

I commend *Wrestling with the Church Hierarchy* to you as thinking Catholics who remain within the fold – who like John are hanging on – even if by our fingernails – but finding hope and working for change.

This article was written and delivered by Genevieve Jacobs at the book launch on 27 May 2021 and is republished with permission.

THE CHURCH STRIPPED BARE: HIGH RATE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AMONG ANGLICANS EXPOSED

Julia Baird

The Anglican Church has a serious, dangerous problem with women. A report out this week found that those inside the church are significantly more likely to have experienced abuse than those in the broader population.

It's a stunning finding, worse than predicted, and horrific to think that what should be a place of refuge could be in fact a place of peril for women, and that, despite some recent efforts and the fact that evidence of this has been reported on for years, many clergy remain in denial about it.

The report, commissioned by the national Anglican church, also found those who went to church regularly were more likely to have been in an abusive relationship than those who did not. And, crucially, that perpetrators used scriptural teachings on the sanctity of marriage, forgiveness, the submission of women and headship of men to justify abuse. Clergy confidence in their ability to respond to domestic violence was low.

Only one in 10 victims sought help from the church, something that should prompt serious self-examination by clergy.

The Christian faith is one of mercy, love and acceptance, so these findings are understandably anathema to the faithful. Awareness has grown markedly in recent years, some action has been taken, clergy training programs run, protocols drafted and agreed.

But where is the urgency, the garment-tearing, the rage, shame, fury and thunder from the church, that this is happening in its ranks? Why do anything else at all until this is resolved? Where is the suggestion from archbishops (as there was in Sydney over marriage equality) that clergy rush to the pulpit to denounce the abuse violence of women – this weekend? The muted response from leaders was one of sadness, but survivors need to see sweeping action, and recognition of the true depth and breadth of the problem.

The National Anglican Family Violence Research Report, conducted by researchers from Charles Sturt University, surveyed more than 2000 men and women aged over 18 in December 2019. Asked: "Have you been in a violent relationship with any partner", 22 per cent of Anglicans said yes, compared with 15 per cent of the broader public. But, notably, when presented with specific examples of abuse, 44 per cent of Anglicans said they had been victims

of domestic violence, compared with 38 per cent of the general population. Forty-four per cent!

One thing research consistently shows is that denial shelters perpetrators and prevents victims seeking help. Nine of 10 clergy in the study were aware of the prevalence of domestic violence in the general population, but only six of 10 believed it was “just as common” in the church.

Defensive denial has long been, and remains, a hallmark of the church’s response to reports of abuse in their midst, and to evidence that the doctrine of headship – that men are the heads of women, and women are to submit to their authority – is weaponised regularly by abusers. (This doctrine is a key one in Sydney and other smaller pockets of the church across the country.)

The first piece I wrote on this subject was for this paper in February 2015. In it I asked: “If conservative churches preach the dominance of men, and submission of women, does this add weight to those who think men have a right – even a divine right – to control their partners?”

The rage that ensued from just posing the question was palpable. A theologian, Claire Smith, and a minister, Karl Faase, both quickly wrote articles saying this kind of abuse does not occur in the church – or only extremely rarely – and that ministers do not tell women to stay, and do not teach or behave in a way that might encourage abusive behaviour.

(Like, for example, evangelical John Piper, who once advised women to “endure verbal abuse for a season and ... perhaps being smacked one night”.)

As a result, Christian survivors of abuse started coming to me, in droves. I investigated the subject for a year with my ABC colleague Hayley Gleeson, and we found a culture in churches that was dismissing, ignoring and even enabling domestic violence, with ministers turning a blind eye, denying it existed and telling victims it was godly to stay with abusive husbands.

The aggression of the pushback was jaw-dropping – male commentators, priests, archbishops, pundits, all rounding up to say the church did not have a problem with abuse of women, and in fact the ABC was inventing it and conducting a war on Christianity. We were accused of being “illogical” and “hysterical”.

Death threats rolled in.

Then the clergy wives – infuriated by the denials - came again, in droves. As they spoke, plainly, painfully and courageously of being raped, controlled, attacked, and being told as Christian women they should submit, the blokes of the church got lost in a distracting sideshow about whether some flawed, decades-old American research showed that women in churches were safer. It still amazes me.

Social epidemiologist Professor Naomi Priest, a pre-eminent expert in this field, had already debunked that research but, again, (female) experts were ignored along with (female) survivors.

This week, promoters of the study were eager to underline its commissioning as a positive step towards difficult change, which it was, while others insisted it was a sign that the church was actually leading the way, and had some initiatives in place, and that things were pretty good, given some blokes were now taking things on board.

But it is patently obvious that the report was not affirming but damning.

As pointed out on Twitter, this was a bit like the “Eddie McGuire ‘proud & historic day’ approach” to the Collingwood racism scandal. Where is the contrition that these women were repeatedly ignored? Some have been forced to tell their stories again and again, reliving trauma, and yet when they say churches are not safe, that ministers don’t understand abuse, especially when it’s carried out by one of their own, there are just calls for more data, another report, more dot points, more meetings, more stalling, more laboured explanations, more shoving destructive, criminal behaviour in the bottom drawer.

And clergy seem eager to regard domestic violence as an individual problem, a consequence of alcohol, sin or narcissism, not a structure built on male control, that silences women, denies them authority and demands their obedience. In this context, female rebellion is often cast as sin.

But this report should be a huge wake-up call. The problem is national.

This weekend, there should be vigils in every Anglican church in Australia, then independent expert panels should be called in to help, more female leaders appointed, and every minister, bishop and archbishop should be preaching on the scourge of domestic abuse. Most of all, survivors should be at the centre of every investigation, on every panel, not merely the subject of reports but their authors, shaping change.

Until then, the shocking, shameful finding that women inside churches are more likely to be at risk of abuse than outside them will remain true, just as survivors have been telling us for too many years.

This article was written by Julia Baird and first published in the Sydney Morning Herald on June 12, 2021. Reprinted with permission.

ADVOCATING FOR A CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE IS NOT LIMITED TO ABORTION

Sister Patty Fawkner SGS.

I am proud to name myself as a feminist. Yet, I part ways with the greater majority of feminists on the issue of abortion, writes Congregational Leader Patty Fawkner SGS.

I am not in favour of abortion, particularly when used as a form of contraception and gender selection. Neither am I in favour of using abortion as the sole litmus test of Catholic orthodoxy or moral rectitude. If we are pro-life, which I presume we all are, then we need to be pro-life on all social and moral issues.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago became an ardent advocate for a “consistent ethic of life” back in the early 80s.

“The spectrum of life cuts across the issues of genetics, abortion, capital punishment, modern warfare and the care of the terminally ill,” Bernardin said.

Anyone concerned for the sacredness of life of the unborn or those on death row should be concerned about the sacredness of all life. To Bernardin’s list, we could add issues such as racism, gender violence, sharing COVID-19 vaccines with poorer nations, extinction of species and care for our common home. “When human life is considered ‘cheap’ or easily expendable in one area,” Bernardin proclaimed, “eventually nothing is held as sacred and all lives are in jeopardy.”

While I might advocate on a particular issue in my circle of influence, I need to be “catholic” in my circle of concern, or as Cardinal Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) said: “The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine.” This is a challenge to conservative Catholics who may be anti-abortion and pro-capital punishment, and equally for so-called ‘progressives’ who may be pro-abortion and anti-capital punishment.

We saw an ethic of life on display with full-blown inconsistency during the presidency of Donald Trump.

Trump (expediently?) changed his pro-choice stance to pro-life prior to running for president. The list of his anti-life actions during his four-year term is extensive: the forced separation of babies and children from their parents who illegally crossed the US-Mexico border, his barely concealed racism, the inciting of white supremacists to violence, and his rush to execute

criminals on death row following his election defeat last year, making him “the country’s most prolific execution president in more than a century” (BBC News).

These actions are disturbing in and of themselves, and what is also disturbing is the significant support Trump received from American Catholics, both in the 2016 and 2020 elections. It is estimated that 50% of Catholics voted for Trump because of his views on abortion. Abortion was the litmus test for their vote.

It also seems that for an increasing number of the faithful, abortion becomes the litmus test for who is ‘worthy’ to receive the Eucharist.

There is a strong push in the US, led by Archbishop José H Gomez, President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a number of bishops, to exclude President Joe Biden from the Eucharist because of his views on abortion.

Archbishop Gomez flagged his concerns when “congratulating” Biden on his inauguration. “I must point out that our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender.”

The American bishops are gathering for their 2021 spring general assembly from June 16-18. Their original plan was to draft a policy on the worthiness of pro-choice politicians to receive Communion. That is until the Vatican, in effect, ‘torpedoed’ those plans.

The ‘missile’ came in the form of a letter written by Cardinal Luis Ladaria, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to Archbishop Gomez as head of the bishops conference. Ladaria writes: “It would be misleading if such a statement were to give the impression that abortion and euthanasia alone constitute the only grave matters of moral and social teaching that demand the fullest level of accountability on the part of Catholics.”

In plain speak, throughout his letter, Ladaria is strongly advising/warning/admonishing the bishops neither to weaponise nor politicise the Eucharist.

If President Biden is judged to be unworthy of the Eucharist, then it begs the question as to how many of us are worthy. I take comfort in knowing that God will be the ultimate judge of my worthiness, and also in Pope Francis’ famous words in his first Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, that “The Eucharist ... is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” (EG #47)

It occurs to me that it is better to promote the ‘carrot’ of Christ’s all-embracing, merciful love

rather than the 'stick' of sacramental exclusion and judgment of unworthiness.

And how do we extend Christ's all-embracing, merciful love to the estimated 70,000 of the world's poorest women who die every year as a result of illegal abortion? (WHO, Journal Paper, Sexual and Reproductive Health 4)

I look forward to a world where abortion is not necessary, where women feel safe and secure, and have the support and resources to choose life rather than abortion. This may sound utopian, yet it is a reality worth fighting for by all pro-choice and pro-life advocates.

This article was first published in the June 2021 edition of The Good Oil, the e-journal of the Good Samaritan Sisters www.goodsams.org.au and is republished with permission.

WATAC MEMBERS WHO ARE ILL

Lynette Allen, Sr Jean Cain SOSJ, Sr Genevieve Davey IBVM, Hazel Mezger, Sr Anne O'Shaughnessy OLN and Maureen Togher.

WATAC FRIENDS RECENTLY DECEASED

Graham English 15.06.2021 Late of Eastwood. Formerly of Young. Husband of Erin White.

Deep peace of the running wave be yours.

Deep peace of the flowing air be yours.

Deep peace of the quiet earth be yours.

Deep peace of the shining stars be yours.

The deep, deep peace of the Son of Peace be yours.

From a Celtic Benediction.

WATAC GROUPS

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND: For more information contact *Therese Flynn-Clarke*

Phone: 07 3804 0636 or email: flynn-clarke@bigpond.com

NSW

EASTERN SUBURBS: This Group hasn't met since the Covid restrictions. Maureen Brian and Faye Lawrence are planning to share the hosting. Please let us know of your interest in our starting up again and share any ideas for the group. You can telephone Faye if you wish to enquire more or make any suggestions on 9665 2580 or email flawren@bigpond.net.au.

ENGADINE: Group meets on the third Monday of the month in a member's home at 7.30pm. For more information contact *Margaret Keyes* - Phone: 9520 4240 or email: keyes888@bigpond.com

INNER CITY: Group usually meets on the third Monday of each month. For more information contact *Margaret Cody* Phone: 9692 9384 Mob: 0419 426 174 or email: margaret.cody1@bigpond.com

LEURA: Group meets on the fourth Saturday morning of the month at 227 The Mall, Leura, at 10 am. All welcome. For more information contact *Monica Bright* Phone: 4757 3943 or email: mbright45@bigpond.com

MILTON/ULLADULLA: If you are interested in meeting in this region please contact *Andrea Dean* chair@watac.net.au

PARRAMATTA: Group meets five times a year, bi-monthly on a Monday evening. For more information contact either *Chris Brenton* Phone: 9670 1184 or *Patricia Mayne* Phone: 9630 6721 email: tricia.mayne@froggy.com.au

CANBERRA: Group meets on second Sunday of the month, 3.30-5.30 pm at Narrabundah. For more information contact *Andrea Dean* Phone: 0487 388 873 or email andrea@futurematters.net.au

ONLINE BOOK GROUP

Meets monthly via Zoom. Contact *Tracy McEwan* events@watac.net.au